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WVHRC Staff Adopt Core Values

In April, all employees of the Commission participated in the creation and adoption of the agency's Core Values during the monthly "all staff" meeting. The concept of Core Values was suggested during the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's "Leadership Academy," a 9-week program for leaders of Fair Employment Practice Agencies (FEPAs) attended virtually by Executive Director Tia Welch and James "Tony" Spenia along with other FEPA leaders from EEOC's Philadelphia District for State, Local, and Tribal Programs.

Director Welch guided the discussion about Core Values, and instructed the staff to separate into small working groups to suggest core values of the WVHRC. Each group presented their suggestions and reasoning, and then the whole staff engaged in discussion and refinement of the nominated values until an agreement was reached on the 5 Core Values: respect, integrity, fairness, dedication, and professionalism. Core Values apply not only to how WVHRC employees treat complainants, respondents, and their representatives, but also apply to how we treat government partners, the public, and each other.

New Arrival

Mark Elswick joins WVHRC as an Investigator III. He is a retired WV State Trooper with 25 years of experience serving and protecting the citizens of this great state. Mark was awarded the "Outstanding Criminal Investigator" award in 2013 from the Fraternal Order of Police, Oak Hill, WV. He was promoted to Sergeant in 2015 and was a Detachment Commander until he retired. Mark resides in Nicholas County in a small town known as Dixie, WV with his wife of almost 13 years. He has 6 children and 2 stepchildren and provides care for his mother, Kay. When Mark finds free time, he enjoys hunting, fishing, and finding new hiking trails in our beautiful state with his family. Mark looks forward to continuing to provide services to the citizens of West Virginia.



WVHRC Around Town

In addition to our outreach efforts, you may have also seen or heard about us around your town. The WVHRC had billboards in Charleston, Huntington, Morgantown, and Parkersburg, an ad on the scoreboard at Laidley Field in Charleston, as well as radio ads on WAJR and WRVZ, plus media blasts through the Charleston Area Alliance. Our goal is to ensure that every West Virginian knows where they can turn if faced with discrimination in housing, employment, or public accommodation, and we hope these efforts will aid in reaching that goal. If you see any of our advertising around your town, be sure to snap a picture and share it to the WV Human Rights Commission Facebook page at www.facebook.com/WVHRC.



Administrative Professionals Day

On April 27, 2022, the West Virginia Human Rights Commission celebrated Administrative Professional Day. All Administrative Professionals were presented with a certificate and an "Administrative Assistant Survival Kit." The kit included gum, a pen, a notepad, peppermints, hand sanitizer, chocolate kisses, and Lifesavers. The Administrative Professionals were taken out to lunch and chose Cracker Barrel.



2022 FAIR HOUSING CONFERENCE

On April 29, the WVHRC hosted its annual Fair Housing Conference, a virtual event that coincided with the Governor's proclamation that established April as "Fair Housing Month" in West Virginia. Executive Director Tia Welch hosted the event, and Housing Investigators Tiffany Caldwell and Jeffrey Plear read the Governor's proclamation and key provisions of the Fair Housing Act. Dozens of virtual attendees were also greeted by Governor Justice, DHHR Secretary Bill Crouch, and WVHRC Chairman Dr. Darrell Cummings, who each emphasized the importance of fair housing protections and the work of the Human Rights Commission.

This year, the WVHRC was privileged to welcome expert presenters from neighboring states that do similar work to enforce fair housing laws. Lisa Kelly gave a thorough presentation about unlawful harassment under the Fair Housing Act and explained that victims are often women who face sexual harassment from housing providers at times when they are already facing difficult circumstances. Ms. Kelly is the Chief of Investigations for the City of Baltimore Office of Equity and Civil Rights, and she provided powerful examples of the damages suffered by victims of unlawful sexual harassment.

To close the event, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Adrian Garcia taught viewers about the Fair Housing Act provisions that protect persons with disabilities from discrimination. Mr. Garcia made important points about the interplay between the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act and spoke in detail about housing providers' obligations to provide reasonable accommodations and modifications to persons with disabilities.



The poster is for the April Fair Housing Month Fair Housing Virtual Conference. It features a blue and white color scheme with a large blue diagonal stripe on the left. At the top left, there is a logo for "CELEBRATING 60 YEARS" with a West Virginia state capitol dome icon and the text "WEST VIRGINIA Human Rights Commission". On the right, there is a portrait of Tia Welch, Executive Director, with her name and title below it. The main text in the center reads "April Fair Housing Month", "Fair Housing Virtual Conference", "April 29, 2022 at 9:00AM", "Hosted by:", "WV Human Rights Commission", "Topics: Discrimination & Sexual Harassment in Housing", and "and ADA Compliance in Housing". On the left side, there are two circular portraits of speakers: Lisa Kelly, Chief of Investigations for the City of Baltimore, Office of Equity and Civil Rights, and Adrian Garcia, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. At the bottom left, there is a logo for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with the text "Sponsored by U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD)".

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS
WEST VIRGINIA
Human Rights Commission

April Fair Housing Month

Fair Housing Virtual Conference

April 29, 2022 at 9:00AM

Hosted by:

WV Human Rights Commission

Topics: Discrimination & Sexual Harassment in Housing

and

ADA Compliance in Housing

Speaker: Lisa Kelly, Chief of Investigations
City of Baltimore, Office of Equity and Civil Rights

Speaker: Adrian Garcia, Executive Director
Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

Tia Welch, Executive Director

Sponsored by U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Hidden In Plain View

Juneteenth, short for June 19th, commemorates the effective end of slavery in the United States. This year, WVHRC investigator Joseph Saunders was honored to commemorate the event at a place that is very special to his family's history.

The Smoot/Saunders family began in Tazewell, Virginia as part of the first settlers. This was prior to the Civil War, and during that conflict many recalled hearing cannon fire, seeing soldiers marching, and watching events unfold at the battle of Saltsville in 1863. During that time, words reached the slaves that freedom was theirs. Instant hardships were cast upon those who were set free with no food, clothing, or a place to lay one's head, as the "bitter enders" sought to reimpose slave conditions, which is when great-great-grandfather Milton Smoot fled through the Underground Railroad.

157 years later, Joseph Saunders returned to Tazewell, Virginia as the keynote speaker and spoke at the platform on Main Street, where his great-great-grandfather was possibly sold, to tell the story of Milton Smoot and his trek on the Underground Railroad. Theory was bridged into practice by revealing the secret of how slaves used the "Quilt Code" to follow the path to freedom. He additionally revealed the route through Southern West Virginia that began in Tazewell moving to Rt. 52, Bluefield, Bramwell, Kimball, Norfolk, and Welch, eventually landing on Workman's Branch in Boone County.

Finally, Saunders told the story of the Brush School where slaves learned the tactics before they got on the Underground Railroad on how to become physically, mentally, and spiritually ready. This article doesn't allow a fraction of the time to properly tell the story. However, more information can be obtained by going to WVVA-TV "In Focus" and watching a 30-minute segment on March 30, 2022, titled Hidden in Plain View.



WVHRC Celebrates Juneteenth

The WV Human Rights Commission participated in the annual Juneteenth Celebration held on June 18th, 2022, at the State Capitol Complex. This event was sponsored by The Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs (HHOMA). There were several other vendors and performers from throughout the state. It was a successful event for WV Human Rights Commission in our outreach work.

U.S. Women's Soccer Team Scores Victory for Equal Pay

In May, both men's and women's U.S. Soccer teams announced that they have reached a new agreement granting both equal pay and working conditions. Until now, the women's team was paid through a guaranteed salary that did not match the appearance fees and game bonuses of their male counterparts' pay-to-play system; now both teams will be paid the same amounts in the same way. This policy also includes pooling World Cup prize money and sharing it equally; this establishes a totally new precedent among international soccer federations.



Image © Showbizz Daily

This agreement was achieved through collective bargaining agreements facilitated by both teams' unions. By breaking away from a global industry standard in pursuit of gender equality, both groups have demonstrated a sense of solidarity and equality that can inspire people of any profession.

Fire Safety Training

The West Virginia Human Rights Commission was thrilled to welcome Fire Marshal Richard J. Symms from the Charleston Fire Department for fire safety training on April 22, 2022. Marshal Symms examined our fire safety protocols and provided us with an explanation of what we were doing right, and where we could improve. He also provided us with some great tips on how to minimize the risk of starting a fire at home or in the office, and we were surprised to learn that the overwhelming majority of fires arise from some sort of human error. We would like to extend a thank you to Marshal Symms, the Charleston Fire Department, and the Safety Committee here at the WVHRC for bringing this together.



Honoring the Memory of Kat Massey

Katherine “Kat” Massey was a strong advocate for civil rights and education for Buffalo’s Black community. On May 14, 2022, a white supremacist teenager killed her and nine others while they shopped in a supermarket in their predominantly Black neighborhood.

“We lost a powerful, powerful voice,” former Erie County Legislator Betty Jean Grant told The Buffalo News.

Massey was also a member of We Are Women Warriors. Grant founded the group, which provides information to aid and educate families and the community on socio-economic, environmental, and criminal justice issues.

“Any life has worth, and loss of any life is really bad for the

family and the community and the City of Buffalo,” Grant said. “But to lose such a fighter, someone who was so eloquent ... to lose that voice.”



Image © Yahoo News

West Virginians in Civil Rights History

Ellis Ray Williams, Sr. was born in Newberry, South Carolina in 1921 and moved to Gary, West Virginia in 1928 to take advantage of economic and educational opportunities. He recently passed away on July 4, 2022. The scholastic and athletic excellence Williams demonstrated at an early age continued at Bluefield State College, where he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English and Social Studies.

He earned a master’s degree in Sociology and Industrial Education from West Virginia University and a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Education from Virginia Polytechnical Institute and State University.

Williams joined the United States Army Enlisted Reserve Corp in 1942. Following completion of combat training, he entered the WWII European Theatre in August 1944 and served in the distinguished 777th Field Artillery Battalion, 9th Army as a Tech 5, C Battery forward observer radio operator. He served nine months of combat duty in the Roer Valley, Rhine River and Battle of the Bulge.

Following his military service, Williams enjoyed a long career with the McDowell County Board of Education as a teacher, coach, and principal. He has served on the Wyoming County Board of Education, at Bluefield State College, in the West Virginia Department of Interior and as a member of the West Virginia Community Action Directors Association.

The recipient of numerous formal awards for his work in education and human rights, Williams has a powerful history of leadership, civic responsibility, and community service. A strong advocate for education, he believes in raising the intellectual aspirations of students, cultivating their innate potential, stressing the importance of tolerance in a multi-ethnic society and teaching to individual and group needs. At age 97, Williams is still an active member of the Alpha Upsilon Boule of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, the Bluefield State College Alumni Association, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, the Kimball Memorial Building board and the Tug River Health Association board.



Image © West Virginia University

SUMMER

I	P	F	C	O	H	G	N	I	P	M	A	C	A
B	P	S	I	O	I	T	A	N	A	G	E	U	O
A	G	S	L	S	O	P	I	C	N	I	C	S	S
R	E	I	M	O	H	K	C	P	E	I	B	R	E
B	S	I	S	O	C	I	O	C	E	C	C	V	L
E	O	T	U	I	R	E	N	U	U	E	A	R	C
C	C	M	N	S	O	E	A	G	T	C	S	E	I
U	F	U	N	S	A	N	S	N	A	R	A	L	S
E	C	P	C	I	A	O	N	T	I	E	N	K	P
P	O	O	L	N	S	B	I	P	P	A	D	N	O
B	E	A	C	H	O	O	D	C	M	M	S	I	P
N	L	E	M	O	N	A	D	E	B	N	E	R	L
L	S	W	I	M	M	I	N	G	N	B	P	P	C
H	S	R	O	O	D	T	U	O	T	O	H	S	A

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/3804714/>

Celebrating Staff Birthdays

We had three birthdays this quarter, so give a big HAPPY BIRTHDAY to Kayla, Hazra, and Joe!

SMORES
SUN
POPSICLES
FUN
VACATION
BEACH
HOT
PICNIC
SPRINKLER
SWIMMING
OUTDOORS
TAN
BARBECUE
OCEAN
CAMPING
COOKOUT
FISHING
SAND
POOL
ICE CREAM
LEMONADE

WHAT WE DO

The WV Human Rights Commission provides outreach and education to residents of WV on Fair Housing, Equal Employment and Public Accommodations through annual training conferences and seminars. The Commission is available to provide training in-person and virtually by request.

The Commission can assist residents by providing documents to file a complaint of discrimination with the West Virginia Human Rights Commission. Once a citizen files a complaint, the WVHRC will investigate claims for cause findings. If a complainant has a probable cause finding, the Commission will provide an attorney through the Attorney General's Office, Civil Rights Division free of charge, and the case will be heard and decided by the Commission's Administrative Law Judge.

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